IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently amended) A method of retrieving an image from at least one of an information-storage medium and an information network, said method comprising:

a) setting a retrieval request containing a degree of importance for a plurality of keywords by assigning a degree of importance to each keyword ~~assigning a priority to a keyword, said keyword operative as a tag, which is tagged to an image~~;

b) calculating a necessity signal for an image based on the retrieval request and said plurality of keywords, each of said plurality of keywords being tagged to the image ~~a degree of importance for the image based on the priority assigned to the keyword~~; and

c) searching for the image from at least one of an information-storage medium and an information network and displaying the image, based on the necessity signal ~~the degree of importance of the image~~.

2. (Currently amended) The method of retrieving an image as defined in claim 1, wherein each keyword ~~the tag~~ is classified into a ~~by each~~ class and each class comprises a plurality of keywords.

3. (Previously presented) The method of retrieving an image as defined in claim 1, wherein the image is displayed in order of priority of the degree of importance.

4. (Currently amended) An apparatus for retrieving an image from at least one of an information-storage medium and an information network, said apparatus comprising:

a) a menu entry section that allows an user to set a retrieval request containing a degree of importance for a plurality of keywords by assigning a degree of importance to each keyword ~~assign a priority to a keyword, said keyword operative as a tag, which is tagged to an image~~;

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b) a retrieval section calculating a <u>necessity signal based on the retrieval request and said</u> <u>plurality of keywords, each of said plurality of keywords being tagged to an image</u> ~~degree of~~ ~~importance for the image based on the priority assigned to the keyword~~ and searching for the image from at least one of an information-storage medium and an information network based on the <u>necessity signal</u> ~~degree of importance of the image~~; and

c) a display section displaying the image <u>output</u> ~~outputted~~ from the retrieval section according to the <u>necessity signal</u> ~~degree of importance~~.

5. (Currently amended) The apparatus for retrieving an image as defined in claim 4, wherein <u>each keyword</u> ~~the tag~~ is classified <u>into a</u> ~~by each~~ class and each class comprises a plurality of keywords.

6. (Previously presented) The apparatus for retrieving an image as defined in claim 4, wherein the image is displayed in order of priority of the degree of importance.

7. (Previously presented) The method of retrieving an image as defined in claim 2, wherein the degree of importance of the image is evaluated according to a degree of necessity by each class for the image.

8. (Previously presented) The apparatus for retrieving an image as defined in claim 5, wherein the degree of importance of the image is evaluated according to a degree of necessity by each class for the image.

9. (Currently amended) The method for retrieving an image as defined in claim 7, wherein:

the degree of <u>importance</u> ~~necessity~~ by each class is obtained depending on i) a first value having a larger value as a number of the tags tagged to the image <u>increases</u> ~~increase~~, ii) a second value having a larger value as a number of the tags tagged to the image <u>decreases</u> ~~decrease~~, and

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contributions of the first value and the second value to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~

by each class are determined by a number of non-zero components of a retrieval request signal by

each class.

10. (Currently amended) The apparatus for retrieving an image as defined in claim 8,

wherein:

the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class is obtained depending on i) a first value

having a larger value as a number of the tags tagged to the image increases ~~increase~~, ii) a second

value having a larger value as a number of the tags tagged to the image decreases ~~decrease~~, and

contributions of the first value and the second value to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~

by each class are determined by a number of non-zero components of a retrieval request signal by

each class.

11. (Currently amended) The method for retrieving an image as defined in claim 9,

wherein:

when the number of the non-zero value is larger than a first predetermined value, the first

value mainly contributes to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class;

when the number of the non-zero value is smaller than the first predetermined value, the

second value mainly contributes to the degree of importance ~~necessity~~ by each class; and

which of the first value and the second value mainly contributes to the degree of importance

~~necessity~~ by each class changes with rapidity determined by a second predetermined value in a

neighborhood of a point that the number of no-zero components equals the first value.

12. (Currently amended) The apparatus for retrieving an image as defined in claim 10,

wherein:

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when the number of the non-zero value is larger than a first predetermined value, the first

value mainly contributes to the degree of <u>importance</u> ~~necessity~~ by each class;

when the number of the non-zero value is smaller than the first predetermined value, the

second value mainly contributes to the degree of <u>importance</u> ~~necessity~~ by each class; and

which of the first value and the second value mainly contributes to the degree of <u>importance</u>

~~necessity~~ by each class changes with rapidity determined by a second predetermined value in a

neighborhood of a point that the number of no-zero components equals the first value.

13. (Previously presented) The method of retrieving an image as defined in claim 2,

wherein the image is displayed in order of priority of the degree of importance of the image.

14. (Previously presented) The apparatus for retrieving an image as defined in claim 5,

wherein the image is displayed in order of priority of the degree of importance of the image.